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VALOR: Famed Tuskegee airmen (from left) George Watson Sr., Dabney Montgomery, Roscoe Brown and Wifred DeFour are honored in Queens yesterday.

New 'Tails' of WWII heroes

By IKIMULISA LIVINGSTON

It was World War II, and a German flying ace was about to match his wits against a raw, 23-year-old American fighter pilot who had nerves of steel and the brashness to do the unimaginable.

The Allied airman, Roscoe Brown Jr., was no ordinary pilot.

He was a Tuskegee Airman of the legendary African-American squadron that fought not only the Germans, but also prejudice back home.

On a mission into the heart of Nazi Germany, the Army Air Corps captain spotted the enemy ace aiming for a bomber plane that he and his squadron was escorting. He surged into action.

"I told them to drop their extra fuel tanks and follow me," Brown recalled of the do-or-die dogfight in his painted red-tail P-51 Mustang. "I did a tricky maneuver that



ELIJAH KELLEY
Plays Tuskegee airman.

"I'd been practicing, and I got behind the [fighter]."

Brown shot the Nazi down. Sounds like a Hollywood movie? It is.

"Red Tails," the latest from George Lucas, tells the true story of the Tuskegee, Ala.-based 332nd Fighter Squadron.

Brown, now 89, who lives in Riverdale in the Bronx, and earned a master's and Ph.D. from NYU, said he worked for 30 years to have the unit's story told. He consulted

on the film and worked with the actors.

"It's very gratifying," he said.

He and four other Tuskegee Airmen were honored yesterday at a fundraiser held at the Riverview Restaurant in Long Island City for the Learning Tree, a private school in Corona, Queens.

"It's cool to be smart. That's the message I want to pass on to kids," Brown said. "The Tuskegee Airmen were obviously very cool. We couldn't have done what we did without being smart."

Another honored airman was Dabney Montgomery, 88, who is enjoying his newfound celebrity produced by the film.

When he wore a baseball cap emblazoned with the Tuskegee name a few days ago, a post office clerk recognized him as one of the famous airmen, and bragged to her colleagues as if Brad Pitt had walked up to her window.

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